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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, July 13, 1934.

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Subject: "Fish for the Frugal." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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At any time of year, in most parts of the United States, you can get a good food bargain in fish. Many housewives don't take advantage of this, perhaps because they think of fish as just fish, not knowing how many kinds there are, or how to make the most of all these different kinds. Our chief consumers of fish are the foreign-born Americans, who were used to eating fish in their native Scandanavia, Germany, Poland, France, Portugal, Italy or Russia, and our Catholic and Jewish populations who, for religious reasons, eat fish on many occasions instead of eating meat.

But many of us could use fresh or fresh-frozen fish, or canned or dried fish any day in the week and have a cheap, nourishing meal. Just as a sample menu for such a meal, you might have fish, hot biscuits or corn bread, tomatoes or greens, milk to drink and fruit from your garden for dessert. Or you might have fish, potatoes, cold slaw; a cold milk drink or a cup of cafe-au-lait, half hot coffee and half hot milk, and perhaps wild blackberries for dessert. Either of these combinations makes a cheap and fairly well-rounded meal. Or, if you like a meal-in-one dish, you might try the Italian fisherman's favorite "ciopine," or the French or Creole Bouillabaise, or, our own New England fish chowder served on toast or crackers. That makes a very cheap meal anywhere in the United States.

The food value of most kinds of fish is similar to meats and poultry in having high protein value. But the flesh of salmon and some other fat fish, like herring and sardines, is richer in vitamins A and D than any meat. Saltwater fish furnishes iodine, too, and for this reason is important food in regions where goiter is common.

But you can't persuade the family to eat fish just by talking about its low price and high food value. The way to make them like it is to make the dish attractive and delicious. So I've gathered together some odds and ends of advice from the specialists on cooking fish to make it good-looking and good-tasting.

The specialists say that dry-meated or lean fish is best for cooking in water or steaming and for curries and chowders, because the meat doesn't go to pieces in the cooking process. Among the common kinds of dry-meated fish are the black bass, the carp, the yellow perch, the pike, pickerel, sturgeon, red snapper, grouper, haddock, cod, pollock, flounder, whiting, sea bass, skate, tile-fish, bonito, yellow tail and amberjack. There's a list of eighteen to choose from. Then, there are the fish that the specialists say have medium-dry or medium-oily

flesh, as you please. These are the cisco, striped bass, weakfish, brook trout, porgy and mullet. The rich, oily fish are the best for oven cooking. They include the salmon, shad, herring, lake trout, pompano, whitefish, mackerel and butterfish. Most of these are in season the year round, and all of them are in season during the summer. Many of them are shipped fresh frozen to all parts of the country.

Of the salt-water fish, those that are most commonly shipped, and, therefore, most often to be had, if you live inland, are: salmon, cod, halibut, haddock and whiting. Haddock and whiting are usually the cheapest. The whiting or kingfish of the Atlantic Coast has in recent years gained a large market in the Middle West. Of fresh-water fish, pike, perch, carp, buffalo-fish, catfish, sucker, cisco, white fish and yellow pike are frozen and shipped to other parts of the country, especially to New York.

The fish that is frozen nowadays is often quick-frozen by new methods that keep it at its best. You can thaw this quick-frozen fish before you cook it, or you can put it on the fire while still frozen. Of course, if you put it on frozen, it will take longer to cook. If you thaw the fish first, remember that you must cook it immediately after thawing. Fish that has been frozen spoils very quickly -- more quickly, in fact, than fresh fish.

The tests of freshness in fish are much the same after freezing as before. The eyes should be bright red; the flesh firm and elastic, so an impression made by pressing it with the finger doesn't remain; the body more or less stiff; and the muscle-tissue white.

And now to ways of cooking fish. French cooks have made a great reputation with their bouillabaisse, and in our own country there is a famous Creole bouillabaisse made in New Orleans. This is a chowder using at least two kinds of fish, one that is oily and one that is lean. Generally, the New Orleans cooks use red snapper and red fish together. They cut the fish up with tomatoes and herbs of many kinds and add allspice, salt, pepper and cayenne. This is a hot, steaming, delicious combination of flavors. The French add shellfish to their bouillabaisse.

The French often boil fish in what they call "court bouillon," a vegetable broth made of carrots, onions, celery, parsley, thyme, bay leaves, cloves, a little vinegar or lemon juice, and salt and pepper boiled together for a half hour. This bouillon gives a delicious flavor to the fish. Then, in Brittany the housewives simmer fish in equal parts of milk and water with salt.

As for the Italians, their famous ciopino is made much as we make a pot-roast. They brown the fish in fat and then simmer it with tomatoes, onions, spices and other seasonings.

Norway is another country where people appreciate fish and know how to cook it. Their great fish delicacy is fish pudding -- fresh haddock ground or pounded into a paste, mixed with eggs and milk, seasoned with salt and a little nutmeg, steamed in a mold, and served with melted butter or cream sauce.

